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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAN; EB/ESC/ISC; OES/OMC
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TAGS: [EPET](#) [ENRG](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [SCUL](#) [US](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGES BANK DRILLING ISSUE: CO-EXISTENCE NOT IN THE
FISHING INDUSTRY'S DICTIONARY

REF: HALIFAX 0003; 08 HALIFAX 0073

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11. SUMMARY: Representatives of the fishing industry in southwest Nova Scotia are adamant that there will be no oil and gas drilling on Georges Bank. They contend that rebounding fish stocks and the local economy which depends on the fishery will be adversely affected by any oil and gas activity. They will be pressing a soon-to-be elected provincial government to take the necessary steps to continue a drilling moratorium on the Canadian side of the bank, which is set to expire in 2012. The representatives also expressed their hope that the U.S. Congress will likewise declare the U.S. side of the bank off limits to oilrigs. END SUMMARY.

12. Consul General and Pol-Econ Specialist met on May 11 with fishing industry representatives in southwest Nova Scotia to hear first-hand their concerns over the fate of a moratorium on oil and gas drilling on the Canadian side of Georges Bank (reftels). The Bank is a lucrative offshore area located 100 miles off Cape Cod straddling the U.S.-Canada boundary in the Gulf of Maine. In addition to exploitable fish stocks, the area also contains an estimated one billion barrels of oil and 5.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The representatives included fishermen, fishing boat owners, processors and a business leader who represents five aboriginal communities that now have a commercial interest in the fishery. In voicing their opinions, they acknowledged that in theory it might be possible for the fishing and oil and gas industries to co-exist, as they do in places such as Norway. However, they contend this cannot be the case on Georges Bank. They argue that the Canadian portion of the bank is simply too small to accommodate fishing vessels and drill rigs, plus the number of support vessels attached to the drilling activity. One fisherman said the exploitable area is only 40 miles wide and is like a small city that gets crowded very quickly when numerous fishing boats are out there. While the potential overcrowding is an important part of their argument, their paramount objection is their deeply held conviction that exploration and drilling would do irreparable harm to the environment and disrupt a rebounding fishery that continues to underpin the economy of southwest Nova Scotia.

13. Several of the attendees remarked how the health of numerous transboundary fish stocks have rebounded in recent years, proving scientists' contention that the Bank supports one of the fastest growing and richest biomasses in the world. This re-growth in the stocks only came about after they were almost fished to extinction, a development that prompted New England and Nova Scotia industry reps to work on cooperative strategies to restore the stocks. Now, as the representatives pointed out, fishermen and processors are reaping the benefits of that joint

stewardship and they want to ensure that the prosperity they are enjoying today continues, not only for them but also for subsequent generations. They see the future of the fishery as critical to their cultural prosperity as well. This area of Nova Scotia is home to generations of French-speaking Acadians who have fished these waters for hundreds of years. With assimilation into the overwhelming English culture of North America an ever-present threat, they assert that they need a viable fishery to ensure the survival of their small Acadian seaside communities and their unique cultural heritage.

¶4. While acknowledging that there was little new in their arguments, the representatives were very appreciative of the opportunity to personally outline their case. They also used the meeting to voice their hope that the U.S. Congress would enact a moratorium on the U.S. side of the bank, or at least declare it off limits to the oil and gas industry. They left little doubt that they are not prepared to soften their anti-drilling stance, especially the aboriginal business representative who made it clear that his communities were just starting to enjoy this new revenue source and would be loath to put it in jeopardy. (So great was his concern for the CG to hear his views, that he drove eight hours from his home in Cape Breton to attend the meeting.)

¶5. In contrast to the anti-drilling forces, there is a less vocal, but equally adamant pro-drilling side to this debate. The province's oil and gas sector, supported by some business leaders in southwest Nova Scotia, want to see the oil and gas industry be given a fair chance, especially since there would be significant economic impacts to any new offshore activities.

¶6. COMMENT: As reported reftels, the Nova Scotia provincial government will have to give consideration to both sides of this debate when deciding on the future of the moratorium. However, the issue is temporarily on hold pending the outcome of a June 9 provincial election. All the political parties have been

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Careful to avoid bringing up the issue on the campaign trail, but for the party that emerges the victor, there will be little time to weigh the arguments, as there is a June 2010 deadline for the province to indicate how it will proceed on the moratorium. Given post's first-hand exposure to the sentiment of the fishing industry, it is clear that there can only be one outcome that will satisfy the fishing industry representatives: No co-existence policy and definitely no rigs on Georges Bank.
END COMMENT.
FOSTER